

**Why aren't there any challengers to Najib's position, asks ex-NST editor  
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By Sheridan Mahavera**

Has Umno become too autocratic or does the party lack talented leaders who can challenge Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, a former Umno-linked English newspaper editor asked today.

In his latest blog posting, Datuk A Kadir Jasin wrote that Najib was comfortable in his current position as Umno president despite various issues plaguing Malaysia.

"Before the disappearance of MH370, Malaysians had suffered from drought, forest fires, haze and water rationing," said the former New Straits Times group editor-in-chief.

"Ratings and criticism do not appear to have threatened Najib's position as Malaysia's PM.

"Indeed, it can be described as an irony that while Najib is Malaysia's prime minister with the worst performance in a general election since the May racial riots in 1969, he is unchallenged.

"There does not seem to be any sustained challenge which can force him to step down from his position in Putrajaya and Umno," Kadir said.

He said it was different for Najib's predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, whose rule was met with fierce resistance from various quarters.

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was a vocal critic of Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir was assisted by deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin as well as pro-Umno bloggers.

However, Najib has not faced a similar threat nor do any of the current Umno leadership seem overly interested in becoming PM, Kadir said.

"It is quite different from Abdullah's reign when Najib expressed an interest in assuming the number one position in Malaysia.

"In a nutshell, Najib's weakness is his strength," Kadir said, adding that Najib was unpopular and his ratings were dropping.

"But he seems to be getting stronger every day, strong enough to shut veteran Umno leaders and shake them using the mainstream media."

Kadir noted that recently, Umno mouthpiece Utusan Malaysia and the Media Prima group gave wide coverage to PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin.

Shamsul had questioned why Daim had not been included in the list of Malaysia's 40 richest individuals when there was public perception he belonged in the ultra-rich category.

"The stage show became more evident when Najib issued a brief statement expressing regret over PKR's attack on Daim," Kadir said.

He also said there were signs that Najib and his administration were relieved to take cover behind the MH370 tragedy.

"After more than three weeks, the mystery of MH370's disappearance is far from being solved.

"We have seen first-hand the strengths and weaknesses of our leaders in handling an international crisis."

Kadir also noted changes he had observed following the Kajang by-election last weekend.

"The urban and semi-urban support for Pakatan Rakyat appears to be getting stronger," he said.

"Najib should be taking care of Bumiputera voters both economically and emotionally.

"But he seems to be more intent on trying to woo Chinese voters with various offerings and promises," Kadir said.

"The rakyat in the rural areas are the ones who are stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"They are stuck between rising cost of living, inflation and the falling prices of commodities such as rubber and palm oil."

Kadir added that these people did not have any avenues to voice their worries and anxieties like city dwellers as they still relied on traditional mainstream media. – March 29, 2014.

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